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ABSTRACT

Mounds View, a K-12 district serving 11,400 students in the St. Paul and Minneapolis (Minnesota) suburbs, used to experience prolonged, hostile negotiations between administrators and the teachers' association. After a particularly bitter round of bargaining in 1984, the district began searching for less adversarial approaches. The district hired a consultant to help staff unload bitter feelings, solve problems as colleagues, not combatants, and begin trusting each other. This paper describes Mound View's Professional Council, which grew out of the district's desire for authentic teacher/administrator collaboration. From the beginning, the council agreed to create an environment of mutual respect, cooperation, and teacher involvement; to promote open discussion, study, and resolution of professional concerns; to specify membership of four teachers and four administrators; to give veto power only to the superintendent or the executive board of the teachers' association; and to pay council members as much as head coaches of major sports. After outlining agenda items and suggested improvements when bargaining for a new contract, the paper summarizes some observations about the council's progress. First, American public education needs shared decision-making by teachers and administrators and teacher judgments to shape school goals and daily operations. Empowering teachers is the challenge of this decade; teachers need to be treated and rewarded as professionals. The new system does not resolve all problems or obviate the need for administrators. The new leadership of the 1990s will hopefully blend assertiveness with participation and practice the value of teamwork and trust. (MLH)

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FRIDAY, Feb. 19

Successful Practices Session

Presented by . . . .

Burton M. Nygren, Superintendent
Mounds View (Minn.) Public Schools

mounds view education association

MV 621

Mounds View Public Schools

UNION ● ADMINISTRATOR COLLABORATION THAT WORKS

Background

Mounds View is a K-12 district serving 11,400 students in the northern suburbs of St. Paul and Minneapolis. (This metropolitan area is now known as the "TWINS" Cities.) Minnesota has a long history of collective bargaining by public employees. Strikes are legal and do occur.

Our school system in the 1970's and early 80's had prolonged, hostile negotiations with the teachers' association. We endured near strikes, distasteful struggles in the media, unending grievances, and divisive confrontations between administrators and teachers. We seldom spoke without raised voices. After a particularly bitter round of bargaining in 1984 (worn-out, disgusted, and frightened by what the bashing was doing to students and a good school system) we came to our senses. Together we began to search for approaches less adversarial. Tired of fighting, tired of always having to win even when the institution was being damaged, tired of using precious resources on non-productive activities, we decided to build positive relationships. Out of desperation, but with a sense of hope, we began to solve our problems and to build respect for each other.

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What is the Solution?

As teachers, administrators, and board members we had been "circling the wagons" and then shooting within the circle at each other! It sounds crazy. It is. This is not unique to Mounds View. Public school districts across the country (including superintendents in this audience) know exactly what I am talking about. Authentic teacher/administrator collaboration, shared decision-making, participatory management (whatever the terms) simply does not exist in many places. Time is running out. Patience is wearing thin. The choice is obvious: Teachers and administrators must either start working together as equals (truly sharing power) or institutions are going to unravel. We will learn to swim together, or we will sink together.

Our school system got professional help from a consultant with teachers and school board sharing the cost. With care and patience we began to unload some rugged history, and to speak finally about bitter feelings. The consultant assisted us in solving problems as colleagues, not combatants. Goals had to be set. We began to fix wrongs and to believe again in our school system. Most importantly, we began to trust each other.

We were tip-toeing into a revolutionary concept based on problem-solving, not power. This is not a foolish strategy. Research on effective schools reveals that when teachers and administrators work cooperatively, students win by getting better educations. The evidence is clear. When teachers control their professional destinies, they are empowered to produce some remarkable results. The best way to strengthen the schools of America is to take teachers seriously.

Mounds View learned conflict and confrontation are not inevitable. Using resources such as Getting to Yes (the 1981 gem written about the Harvard Negotiation Project by Roger Fisher and William Ury), we began to understand that even when points of view are very different, you can get to "yes." And

you can get there respecting each other. Indeed, you build strong relationships along the way. We learned to collaborate, and we liked it. Liberated from foolish strife, ways were found to practice responsible problem-solving. Morale improves. Teacher and administrator talents blossom once again.

Stanislaw Damas, in a speech on "Minimizing Pain and Maximizing Gain" given at the San Diego (1987) meeting of National Association of Educational Negotiators, emphasized the benefits of less confrontive approaches:

1) healthy, positive communications
2) less stress
3) positive public impact
4) eliminates need for posturing including the energy and time that takes
5) focuses on problem solving, not creating conflict
6) results in more creative options

The Professional Council

The title of this session is "Union-Administrator Collaboration that Works." Let me tell you what the Teachers' Association and Mounds View School Board bargained the summer of 1985. (A handout including the contract language will be available at the end of this session.) The concept is both progressive and exciting. It is experimental, maybe risky, but in my judgment the correct first step. It is a solution, for school districts which want to explore authentic teacher/administrator collaboration.

In Mounds View the idea is called the Professional Council. We agreed (quoting from the master contract) there was a "need to have involvement of professional employees in the decision-making processes."

- We agreed to create "an environment of mutual respect, cooperation, and involvement of teachers....."

- We agreed the Professional Council would "have as its primary purpose the open discussion, study, and resolution of professional concerns."

- We agreed there would be 4 teacher members (chosen by the Association) and 4 administrator members (chosen by the Superintendent). The body would be autonomous, not subject to direct School Board control.

- We agreed the decisions of the Professional Council could be vetoed only by the Superintendent and/or the Executive Board of the Teachers' Association. This condition was critical in demonstrating that both the Teacher's Association and Superintendent had equal power on Professional Council agenda matters.

- We agreed the members of the Professional Council would be paid for their service. Indeed, pay would be recognized as a signal that such work was highly valued and membership on the Professional Council was a prestigious position in our school district.

  In the 1985-87 contact it was decided Professional Council members would receive roughly the same pay as head coaches of major sports — $3,000 per member per year.

Professional Council Agenda

The Professional Council now in its third year of operation has worked on such agenda items as:

1) A person's teaching load and related responsibilities when involved in multi-district instruction using cable television
2) The use of resonable force in disciplining students
3) Teacher and principal use of the professional work day at the end of each academic quarter
4) Recommendation on how to conduct a District study and committee process to adopt a new system of teacher evaluation
5) A study of various shared decision-making models for teachers and principals to consider

The Superintendent's veto has been used only once on a matter which I believed should be brought to the bargaining table rather than resolved by the Professional Council. The Teachers' Association has not used the veto.

Evaluation of the Professional Council

In 1987 when a new two year contract was bargained with teachers, the Professional Council was continued with one change — the membership was increased from 8 to 10 (adding one more teacher and one more principal) to permit broader representation. An evaluation of the Professional Council was completed after two years of operation. These improvements were suggested:

1) Clarify better how matters get on the Profesional Council agenda.
2) Communications to all teachers and administrators from the Professional Council must be increased particularly as solutions are being formulated, so people are not surprised when a decision is announced.
3) Define better what is meant by "professional concerns"
4) Decide earlier whether or not an issue should be handled as school board policy or a bargaining topic rather than by the Professional Council.
5) Concerns were expressed that the Professional Council process was too slow. Also, there was criticism with the small number of accomplishments by the Professional Council. (Let me comment on this last concern. Developing lasting relationships, learning how to genuinely collaborate, and using creative problem-solving models are not "quick-fix" type of activities. A Professional Council is a difficult and time consuming process.)

Summary Comments

There are several observations I would make in summary:

1) American public education needs schools where decision-making is shared by teaches and administrators. I am not talking about advisory councils or giving teachers some input. Teacher judgments must shape the goals and daily operations of their school. This is increased professionalism. This is empowerment of teachers. I am urging all administrators to value teachers, to respect teachers, and to openly demonstrate that teacher viewpoints do count. Bob Astrup (President of the Minnesota Education Association and a teacher from Mound View) has an effective way of expressing why teacher involvement is so crucial: "Remember, a teachers' working conditions are a students' learning conditions."

2) Empowering teachers is the challenge of this decade. Union-management collaboration is not a fad. Teachers must have ownership of a school's problems and this is accomplished through authentic participation. Good managers know you get people to work harder and smarter when they are motivated. What motivates? Involvement. Ownership. When a teacher (treated as a professional) has choices and decisions, the greatest of all motivators is unlocked — the knowledge that a person is making a difference and is in control of his or her professional destiny. Teachers are willing to accept demanding expectations and are willing to bear the consequences of failure. But as a part of this emerging "professionalism," teachers do want to be rewarded for strong performances. The term, "Participatory Leadership," describes well this enlightened process where teachers and administrators work collaboratively to solve problems, not create problems for each other. The recent joint effort by the National Education Association (NEA) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) called "Ventures in Good Schooling: A Cooperative Model for a Successful Secondary School" is an outstanding example of how teachers and administrators with unity can get significant results in shaping curriculum, evaluating teachers, and maintaining good discipline.

3) In Mounds View the term "we" was used over the years but few professionals (teachers or administrators) had ever experienced the power of "we." You have good schools and the resulting pay-off for students when professionals communicate freely, interact in non-adversarial ways, and constantly strive to develop trust and respect. That is what is meant by "we."

4) Finally, it must be understood I do not believe the Mounds View Professional Council (or any other collaborative model) can solve all problems. Of course some collisions are inevitable (maybe even healthy) in a diverse and dynamic human organization like a school district. Our disputes, however, should be more like family arguments— not like wars! We can create places where administrators have genuine interest in what other people think. We can have institutions where energies are focused on problem-solving, not creating conflict. We can have schools where teachers are asked to make decisions, not told about decisions.

5) I am not proposing school districts without administrators, nor schools without principals. Participatory leadership and shared decision-making models are not a substitute for administrators. Rather, I'm describing an attitude and a process where professionals (both teachers and administrators) sincerely cooperate and meet challenges in an intellectually stimulating manner. Smart principals know the empowerment of teachers is the most powerful resource of an administator. As you spend it, you increase it. Those principals, who worry less about conquest and join with teachers as colleagues, are the principals who have great schools. Superintendents who want to lead great school systems should do the same.

6) The "new leadership" of the 1990's will blend gently some assertiveness with participation. The message is clear to administrators. "It pays to be nice." The single, greatest force producing a top school district is the extent to which the self-esteem of teachers is high. Nothing else matters very much. Everything follows from this. How teachers feel about themselves is what they give to students and parents. The lesson we have learned in Mounds View is that collaboration builds self-esteem.

Conclusion

Recently the AASA published "A Message on Managing Change." In a few words . .

> What teachers needed (and wanted) was a place to work that challenged them, an environment in which they could feel effective and productive without feeling a big manager was hovering over their shoulder, or that the district bureaucracy was constantly searching for ways to prevent them from doing something.

My experience with the Mounds View Professional Council suggests that Las Vegas conventioneers go back to school systems and preach and practice the value of teamwork and trust. These are not new ideas, but there is more preaching than practicing. We can create cooperatively managed schools — schools where teachers are partners. Old habits are difficult to break, and these habits make us combative. We still like to maim more than work sensitively with teachers' feelings and thoughts. Let us have less authoritarian behavior. Hostile, adversarial situations can be turned into cooperative, productive opportunities. Teachers and administrators need to have some compassionate conversations. Are you ready to begin? That's my message. Thanks for listening.

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621 Professional Council

Master Contract, 1987-89

Section 4.12 **Professional Council of the Mounds View Public Schools:**

The School Board and the Mounds View Education Association agree that there is a need to have involvement of professional employees in the decision-making processes of the Mounds View Public Schools. The parties recognize the importance of creating an environment of mutual respect, cooperation, involvement of teachers and administrators in resolving concerns of a professional nature. The Council shall have as its principal purpose the open discussion, study, and resolution of professional concerns, so as to better serve Mounds View students.

The Professional Council shall be formed as soon as possible after the signing of this contract. The Council shall consist of five teachers selected by the Mounds View Education Association and five members selected by the Superintendent.

It is intended that the Council meet on a regular basis on call by the Chair. Any two members may, however, require that a meeting be scheduled by providing written notice to the Chair. The Chair of the Council shall be selected by the Council to serve a one year term. The first Chair shall be one of the teachers appointed to the Council by the Mounds View Education Association. The Council shall determine its own agenda.

It is hoped that resolutions of the Council will be reached by consensus. If consensus is not possible, the Council will decide by majority vote. Any member of the Council may request a secret ballot on any question and such request shall be honored.

Resolutions of the Professional Council shall be reviewed by the Superintendent and the Mounds View Education Association Executive Board. Either may veto a resolution of the Professional Council by written instrument delivered to the Chair within thirty (30) working days of receipt of the Council's resolution. If a resolution is not vetoed, it shall be implemented by the Superintendent as soon as practicable.

The Professional Council is not a substitute for either collective bargaining or the joint policy committee as provided for in P.E.L.R.A.

Professional Council Membership, 1987-88

5 - Teachers

3 - Principals

1 - Personnel Director

1 - Director of Occupational Education